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ABSTRACT

A major educational problem is to maintain a balance. With the release of repression has come a strong emphasis on sex as an individual, enjoyable, communicative and intimate physical activity. The problem of incorporating many aspects, such as the psychological, the physical, the need for intimacy, and the social-value framework, will come only as education for human sexuality becomes a part of education for human, personal and social relating. (Author)

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FORCES NECESSITATING NEW APPROACHES IN SEX EDUCATION *

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Sex education has long been one of my interests and I have attended a number of national conferences on it. Attendance at the first International Symposium on Sex Education has been a delightful experience, yet at times disappointing too. My disappointment is that I am still hearing human sexuality discussed in about the same terms as always. The main body of research still deals very largely with taxonomic issues; how many have had premarital intercourse at what age? Did the participants use contraceptives? What is the frequency of masturbation among males and females? How does religion, schooling and family background relate to sexual behavior?

My point is that we must now begin to think in much broader terms, for times are changing radically. What I intend to do is to throw out some issues to be considered as we anticipate a second International Symposium on Sex Education.

Let me draw an analogy to clarify my meaning. When the first airplane was flown, I was one month old. In other words, the whole aviation industry has developed within my own lifetime. The first 12-minute air flight has been transformed to manned flights to the moon, and unmanned flights into outer space. It is easy to see changes in physical transportation, but think of the psychological, sociological and cultural changes which have occurred as a result. Less easily seen, they have altered our lives even more than our physically quick movement from place to place. As a consequence we now have the intermingling of religious beliefs, world-wide instantaneous transition of ideas by television, methods of warfare which continuously become more devastating, the lessened meaning of national sovereignty, and the need for a world-wide system of peacekeeping and justice.

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Cultural and technological forces are changing both the assumptions and practices of sex education; both must be rethought. I wish to list the most important forces and indicate the educational implications which result.

1. Technical, medical and research knowledge have provided a growing and ever increasing control over the outcomes of sexual functioning. A growing knowledge of the reproductive system, the development of effective contraceptives, and the dynamics of human sexual behavior have provided us with increasing controls and an ever diminishing fear of the exercise of sexuality. This has enhanced and magnified the meaning of choice and the significance of responsibility. Helping with choices and building responsibility must become the central theme of sex education. For example, contraceptive control means that when proper medical-scientific techniques are utilized no unwanted births need occur. The production of children becomes a matter of conscious choice, not chance. These controls are continually being extended and are more and more reliable. The techniques which make it possible for children to be conceived outside the body and nurtured to the time of normal birth by a surrogate mother, even possibly within an artificial womb, are essentially already at hand. Through artificial insemination people can become parents without ever using their sex organs with procreative intent. Some say that reproduction under these conditions should never occur, but the scientific knowledge permitting this is either available or soon will be. The decision not to use it will in itself require a frankness and openness in regard to morality and concepts of sexuality which we have not known heretofore.

Along with this has come the possible control of venereal diseases. A few years ago in the United States they could have been eliminated, but through complacency we lost the opportunity. But knowledgable people no longer fear venereal diseases; neither do they fear planes or autos though they, too, are dangerous.

Research on human sexuality has now humanized our concepts of sex and more it more manageable. Consequently we are now reassessing various sexual manifestations: thus, the need for understanding and accepting homosexuals as persons, not simply as an amorphous category of mysterious beings, mentally and socially disturbed. Studies

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show them to be individuals having the same human needs as other individuals. I have been surprised that in the discussions of this Symposium, there has been only a fleeting reference to homosexuality and the blurring of the clear line which once separated homosexuality from heterosexuality. This seems a definite omission since same-sex behavior is a part of the experience of so many people. Research has likewise blurred other lines; for example, gender identification, the nature of pornography, sharp distinction between maleness and femaleness, and what is normal and what is abnormal.

Sex education can no longer rely upon fears to control behavior--the fears of unwanted pregnancy, of venereal infection, and of family and community disapproval. The ability to control outcomes dispel these fears and, at the same time, both redefine the legitimate uses of sexuality and increase the number of choices to be made. The challenge now is how to build a positive educational approach in which the freedom to choose is recognized and given assistance.

2. Changing authority concepts call for a reappraisal of the kind of authority now accepted for sexual decision making. Formerly traditional practices or religious teachings provided this basis. Authority was often supernaturalistic and imposed. By embracing science we have also accepted the idea of assembling facts, being concerned with their validity, setting up hypotheses, and attempting to use rational thought in making decisions. The power of this force, I think, will increase rather than decline.

Cultures which will have most trouble with the authority crisis are those in which the value system, its morality, is dictated by a traditional, inflexible and transcendental power. This has been a central problem in the Christian culture, for since the standards were imposed by the supernatural they were, therefore, essentially rigid. One either adhered to or rejected certain forms of behavior. The result has been a serious conflict within churches and religious groups over sexual matters: contraception, premarital intercourse, masturbation. There is now a growing religious movement toward humanistic values, that is basing values on human needs, but the conflict with traditional values persists, and sex education is deeply involved in coping with it.

3. In view of the growing world population problem and the lessened need for procreation there is now a need for redefining the use of sexuality. While sex has always been used for other purposes than procreation, the basic assumption was that reproduction was its main if not its only justifiable use. Each doubling of the world's population now occurs in an ever-diminishing number of years. Thus, around 1,650 years were requi[illegible]r the population to increase from 250 million to 500 million, but only 45 years for it to increase from 2 billion to 4 billion. This has tremendous consequences in terms of food supplies, potential conflict between nations, and dangers to the physical and mental health of people. Scientific evidence has made it clear that population limitation cannot be successful without taking into account personal and group attitudes toward sex, sex roles, the place of children, and the existing philosophies toward sex and toward life itself.

An argument exists, too, over whether population control can be accomplished without referring to sexuality and sexual attitudes. Sex education, the population authorities say, is a subject so controversial that people interested in population limitation had better avoid it. Yet studies which take into account individual needs and socio-economic class attitudes make it clear that this evasion prevents the necessary communication. National needs and aspirations are important, too, for not every nation feels the need for population limitation.

An important educational task, then, lies in helping to redefine the legitimate uses of sex, and in thinking through the meaning of those uses. In the past we have thought of sex mainly in the negative. Our need now is to utilize it as a creative force; an affirmative experience in the life of individuals and in their relationship with other individuals. Sexuality, broadly speaking, will become (a) more and more openly accepted both as a play-pleasure experience, and (b) as a means of communication and an expression of intimacy. There have been references to the importance of relationships in this Symposium, but no extensive discussion of sex as it affects relationships, no developments of relationship principles, nor not much research which bears upon relationships. These two functions will, I believe, dominate our thinking

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in sex education in the future. They will be the points of first consideration in sex education.

This redefinition of sexuality can genuinely occur only as attention is given to total life satisfactions and human fulfillment. One of the present problems of sex is that it bears a heavy emotional burden in many respects. It may be used to express aggression and hostility, as a competitive experience, and if one believes certain of the undying myths even one's masculinity or femininity depends on one's physical body dimensions. Certainly many people with serious emotional problems seek closeness and intimacy through sexual experiences but never achieve them. We are prone to call this fruitless, never ending, seeking for intimacy through sex as promiscuous behavior. I submit we would be nearer the truth if we called this "love-starved" behavior or "deprivation" behavior.

4. Shifting sex roles stress the need for equality in male-female associations. I have been surprised at so little discussion of roles in this Symposium. In my opinion the creative, positive, self-and group-fulfilling relationships which we want can come only from male-female relationships in which there is essential equality. Patriarchal social structures grew out of a situation in which the physical power of the male was dominant. With the growth in the sources of those technical powers which respond equally well whether the operator is male or female, with an increasing concern for the development of the human potential of all persons, and with expanding education and occupational opportunities for women, came the agonies of readjusting sexual roles. One of the first efforts, for example, was to seek equality by seeing that both men and women, as in the kibbutz, did the same work assignments. In this way the role disparity was to be erased. However, this was too simplistic a solution, particularly in an urbanized and technologically complex society. The effort is now to alter other social patterns. Legal and wage discriminations, the exercise of political power, the inherent differences and similarities between men and women themselves, the nature of equalitarian attitudes, acceptable roles in sexual associations are all being discussed.

5. Intercultural interchange has now raised questions about the value and propriety of various sexual practices. Formerly sexual behavior in other cultures were curious practices we read about only in anthropological books. Now we encounter them frequently, on television and in person, as people travel freely from one culture to another. What seemed yesterday only a curiosity becomes a possible choice for us today. In cultural interchange we have a force which is magnified by other forces. There is no possibility that, except as the whole societal superstructure collapses, sex can ever become again the simple, relatively uncomplicated matter which many once believed, erroneously, that it was.

What is needed now with the world growing smaller and smaller and with people moving freely from one culture to another, is an approach to value-formation which has some universality about it. Universality lies in the development of an attitude which has as its authority for decision making a respect for the needs and welfare of all people. This should be the basis of a world-wide morality. Those acts, feelings, and attitudes which will pull down barriers between people, which facilitate communication, which give a sense of trust in others, and which increase our own self-respect because we have respected others--this concept cuts across cultural lines. This also goes beyond sex and embraces one's intellect, his physical strength, his creativity; no qualities are exempt. This also means that morality must be much more concerned with human needs and the processes by which we relate; much less concerned with the judgment of acts.

To many this appears too idealistic, for we have much yet to learn concerning the basic needs of human beings and the processes of relating may take many forms. But unless we make this transition I foresee only the collapse of our civilization. This is important and necessary in both personal and family lives, and by the fate that directs our human destiny it is a necessity in our national and international affairs.

6. Pluralistic patterns of living and sexual behavior are now pressing for acceptance. These grow naturally from our emphasis upon the individual's realizing, so far as possible, fulfillment in all his capacities, including the sexual. They make,

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however, two important demands on sex education.

First, people must be helped to cope with sexual pluralism. In societies, as they become more and more industrialized and urbanized, intercourse prior to and outside of marriage is being engaged in more and more; homosexuals are acknowledging their own homosexuality more freely and finding acceptance; and references to bisexual interests are more and more common. Some couples live together without marriage; communal living and group sexual relationships, while not common, are openly discussed. All of these practices are being more widely accepted, but still conflicts center around them. Second, since people cannot live wholly individualistic lives, pluralistic patterns must be harmonized with family and social needs. Adjustments will have to be made by both the individual and the group, and it is the obligation of sex education to help.

7. Sex education for the citizen is needed. Formerly sex education was mainly for children and youth, later for married couples, but always for meeting the personal needs of individuals. Today the citizen is asked to support or reject various measures which are advanced by certain groups or by governing bodies. As citizens and molders of public opinion, shall we support laws which permit any sexual activity between consenting adults? What attitudes should be taken toward abortion, the distribution of contraceptive devices to the unmarried, full and complete sex education in the schools? Whose responsibility is it to give sex education? Shall laws be used to enforce a moral code? Should we expect, even encourage, children to have some kind of sexual or erotic experience as they develop? Is it important in the developmental process? Should marriage forms be changed, or if individuals wish, dispensed with entirely? Should the new developments coming from research on reproductive biology be accepted?

Here is a whole new area into which sex education must move. The questions listed are being asked with increasing frequency and intensity. We can see the need for developing this facet of education, for with the removal of repression there will come, especially in societies in which much repression has existed, an explosion of ideas and the multiplications of experiments which will attempt to make use of the new openness.

8. There is a proliferation of efforts to educate people and aid them in enhancing their sexuality. In the United States we are engaged in renewed efforts to get sex education integrated in the school curriculum. We need educational programs reaching all segments of the population. In quite a number of communities sex education resource and counseling centers have been formed. Physicians, clergymen, social workers, counselors, and other professional persons are being prepared to give adequate help. The number of summer workshops for teachers has increased enormously. The Sex Information and Education Council of the United States, which I represent, was founded in 1963 and has established itself firmly. A second organization, the American Association of Sex Educators and Counselors, was formed in 1967.

Summary

A major educational problem is to maintain a balance. With the release of repression has come a strong emphasis on sex as an individual, enjoyable, communicative and intimate physical activity. The problem of incorporating many aspects, such as the psychological, the physical, the need for intimacy, and the social-value framework, will come only as education for human sexuality becomes a part of education for human personal and social relating.

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